

Twang and Slang:  
Regional Origin and Perceptual Dialectology in Ohio

A Senior Honors Thesis

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## INTRODUCTION

An individual's regional origin inevitably shapes some part of their beliefs about the world, whether this takes the form of which sports team they think they should root for, which style of pizza is best, or which ways of speaking are normal or strange. Folk linguistics, the study of what non-linguists believe to be true about language, examines the latter set of beliefs. The folk linguistic subfield of perceptual dialectology in particular has focused much of its attentions on how regionalism shapes non-linguists' language attitudes, and its methods are employed in the current study to examine the language attitudes of Ohio speakers.

Many perceptual dialectology studies have elicited from their participants judgments about the United States as a whole because "US dialects do not (usually) reveal ... finely-tuned differences" on a smaller scale (Preston 2002, 68). However, perceptual dialectology studies such as Benson (2005) and Bucholtz et al. (2007) have focused specifically on the states of Ohio and California respectively, and they have provided ample evidence to refute Preston's claim. Much like Benson (2005), this study sets out to demonstrate that perceived dialects exist on much smaller scales. Indeed, the findings of this study suggest that perceptual dialects may exist on an even smaller scale than even Benson (2005) indicates, as there are notable differences between the perceptions of the participants in the current study from the Cleveland area and the surrounding region of Northeastern Ohio.

It would seem self-evident that an individual's perceptions of linguistic variation are affected by their regional origin, but it is perhaps less self-evident that this can occur within a given state. The current study supports this assertion and puts forward the claim that there are at least two (perhaps four) main groups of people who share similar dialect perceptions based on their regional origin within Ohio. Throughout this paper, these groups will be referred to by their

regional origins, which are Central Ohioans, Northeastern Ohioans and, in the case of the possible third and fourth groups, Southern Ohioans and Northwestern Ohioans. The first three of these groups also correspond to commonly mentioned perceptual dialect regions within Ohio, and they roughly align with the three main dialect regions of state (the Upper South, the Lower North and the Inland North respectively). This finding is significant, as perceptual dialectological boundaries have long been compared with production boundaries in hopes that they will match, thus lending the production boundaries more weight (Preston 2002).

### **Folk Linguistics and Perceptual Dialectology**

Folk linguistics is the study of non-linguists' beliefs about language and the study of non-linguists' beliefs about regional language variation in particular is called perceptual dialectology. The first few perceptual dialectology studies were conducted in the rural Netherlands and Japan (Weijnen 1946) (Rensink 1955) (Grootaers 1959) (Sibata 1959) (Mase 1964), and Dennis Preston began using these research methods to study linguistic variation in American English in 1982 (Niedzielski and Preston 2003) (Preston 2002). Borrowing a method from cultural geography, Preston gave participants a map of the United States that was blank but for the borders of individual states and asked them to identify and label different speech areas.

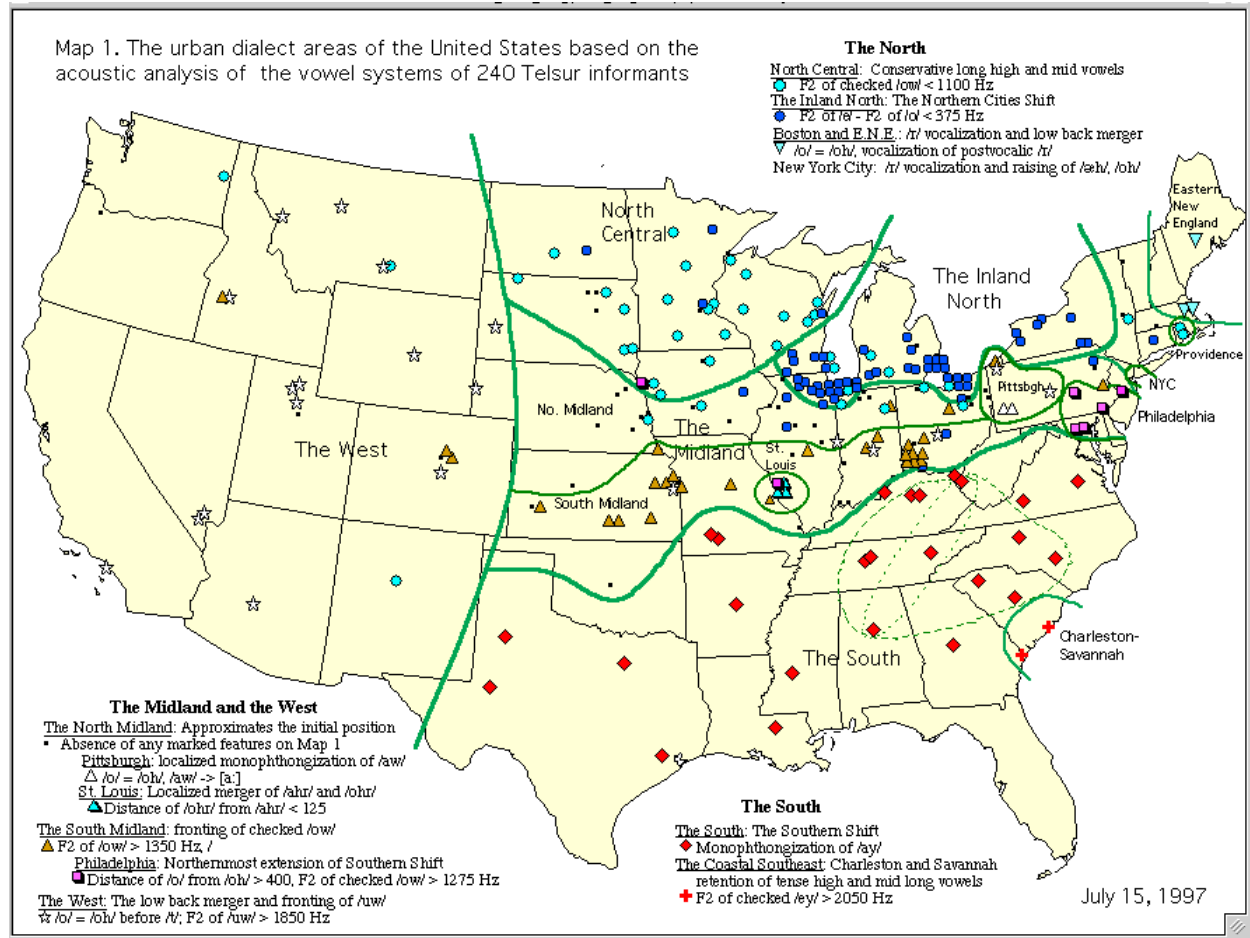
As is noted in Niedzielski and Preston (2003), perceptual dialectology map tasks sometimes result in evaluations that are not actually about linguistic variation. While this information is not explicitly about language, it is by no means useless. It helps to provide the researcher (and future researchers) with valuable ethnographic information about the area being studied and helps provide a clearer picture of the cultural context in which linguistic variation takes place. After all, "the beliefs held by speakers about their own and others' dialects," and indeed the things that speakers conflate with their own and others' dialects, "are influential in the

linguistic life of a community” (Benson 2005, 37). Evidence of such can be seen in the discussion of the enregisterment of Pittsburghese presented in Johnstone et al. (2006). In particular, the paper describes a newspaper article that inaccurately claimed certain linguistic features were unique to Pittsburghese, as well as how this belief in the uniqueness of Pittsburghese contributed to a sense of pride among its speakers and eventually allowed specific linguistic features to become emblematic of the dialect.

Hand-drawn maps are the simplest way to elicit folk beliefs about variation (Niedzielski and Preston 2003). However, map tasks do not necessarily capture nuance in terms of participants’ attitudes toward the areas they identify or how different participants think these areas are from each other. This can be a problem, as it makes it hard to tell how socially meaningful the linguistic differences that participants comment on actually are. To provide more clarity, some perceptual dialectology studies ask participants to rank various states or regions on multipoint scales on how “pleasant” or “correct” they are, and a similar method is used to measure degrees of difference with scales ranging from “same” to “different” (Niedzielski and Preston 2003). While these two methods were not employed in the current study, they are still important tools in a perceptual dialectologist’s repertoire.

A final method involves the playing of a recording of an unidentified speaker and asking a participant to rate the speaker in some way. As described in Niedzielski and Preston (2003), for studies involving such perception tasks, participants have been asked to assign speakers to a specific city as well as to rate them on their pleasantness or correctness. Perception tasks such as these are useful when compared to the previously described methods since they help measure to what extent the boundaries identified in previous studies are reflected in participants’ perceptions of concrete stimuli.

A final important note about perceptual dialectology is that when beginning the research program, Preston originally claimed that perceptual dialectology studies of American English were unsuitable for local evaluations of linguistic variation because, as mentioned earlier, “US dialects do not (usually) reveal the same finely-tuned differences one finds in rural Japan and Dutch-speaking areas” (Preston 2002, 68). Despite this, several studies, including Benson (2005), Bucholtz (2007), Bucholtz (2008), Evans (2011) and Campbell-Kibler (2012), have examined perceptual variation on a statewide level and found that participants had well-developed beliefs about linguistic variation within a single state. It is probably the case that perceptual variation exists in many if not most US states, even if production within the state does not actually significantly vary. Ohio is certainly not an exception to this rule. It is, however, in an unusual position dialectologically, which likely contributes to perceptual variation, but that will be discussed in the following section.



**Figure 1.** A map showing dialect boundaries crossing through Ohio. (Source:

[http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono\\_atlas/NationalMap/NatMap1.html](http://www.ling.upenn.edu/phono_atlas/NationalMap/NatMap1.html))

## Ohio Dialectology

Two major dialectological regions cross the state of Ohio: the Inland North and the Midlands, which is in turn further broken down into northern and southern halves (Labov 1997). The existence of the Inland North is well established and the Northern Cities Shift, the series of sound changes that characterize the region, has been studied a great deal (Labov 1997; Eckert 2000; Ash 2003). The Midlands, in contrast, has been the subject of some degree of controversy, discussed in detail below.

The Inland North is a populous and linguistically distinct subregion of the broader Northern American English dialect, stretching from upstate New York to Madison, Wisconsin and including most major cities surrounding the Great Lakes (Labov 1997). For Ohio in particular, the Inland North encompasses much of the northeastern portion of the state, including larger cities such as Sandusky, Cleveland and Akron (Labov 1997). The unifying trait of this region, as alluded to above, is its participation in the Northern Cities Shift. This shift of six formerly stable vowels was initiated by the raising of /æ/, which paved the way for the systemic shifting of the other vowels involved in the chain (Ash 2003).

The Midlands has not been as well defined by dialectologists. It covers much of the Midwest, including Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, Nebraska, Kansas and parts of Iowa, South Dakota and Oklahoma. The Midlands is traditionally divided by dialectologists into two subregions known as the North Midlands (the northern halves of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Kansas, as well as Iowa, Nebraska and South Dakota) and the South Midlands (the southern halves of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Kansas, as well as Missouri and Oklahoma), and these regions function as a transition zone of sorts between the Northern and Southern dialect regions. This status as an intermediate zone is reflected in the fact that linguists typically have difficulty pinpointing specific linguistic features that characterize the region. As can be seen from the discussion of the Midland's defining features in Labov (1997), the Midland is more defined by what it is not than by what it is; it is distinct from its neighboring dialects because it does not participate in either the Northern Cities Shift or the Southern Shift. (For a detailed description of the Southern Shift, see Labov 1997). However, Labov does note that the South Midlands is distinguishable from its northern counterpart due to the uneven distribution of Southern Shift features therein, as well as the fronting of /ow/ among slightly more than half its speakers.

This difficulty in defining the Midlands has generated some degree of controversy. The concept of the region was first challenged in Bailey (1968), who questions why the southern border of the South Midlands is considered a more significant linguistic boundary than its northern one. As a South Midlands speaker himself, Bailey cites lexical evidence of the South Midlands' greater similarity to the broader South and suggests that since folk perceptions of the South Midlands typically align it with the broader South, the South Midlands should be considered a part of the Southern dialect region. Ultimately, Bailey recommends renaming the North Midlands "Lower Northern," the South Midlands as "Outer Southern" and the rest of the Southern region "Inner Southern." A renaming of the Midlands is also suggested in Carver (1987), although Carver recommends "Lower North" and "Upper South" instead.

This idea of removing the label of the Midlands region from American dialectology is taken a step further in Davis and Houck (1992). For this study, the speech of participants from 11 different cities on a north/south axis from New York to South Carolina was examined for their usage of 12 lexical items and 4 phonological variables. The authors found a linear relationship between usage of Southern features and distance south, putting forth the claim that in place of the Midlands there should merely be a gradient of linguistic southernness. This study has since been critiqued for its methods and claims. Frazer (1994) discusses the fact that the study does not consider the ethnic and linguistic diversity of the Midlands region and its lack of a truly north/south axis. Johnson (1994) addresses the assumption of the study's authors that the methods used to draw up the original Midlands' isoglosses are equivalent to the more quantitative methods they themselves employed, and she ultimately concludes that while there is naturally an overlap between all dialect regions and their neighbors, there are nevertheless distinct dialects, a rule to which the Midlands are no exception.



The current study assumes that there are three distinct dialect regions in Ohio, which are created by broader dialect boundaries that cross through many states. These three regions are those traditionally referred to as the Inland North, the North Midlands and the South Midlands. However, due to the folk linguistic nature of this study and the tendency of Americans to perceive the South Midlands as a part of the Southern dialect, the North Midlands will be referred to as the “Lower North” and the South Midland as the “Upper South” in line with Carver (1987).

### **Ohio perceptual dialectology**

There have been two perceptual dialectology studies of Ohio to date. The first of these is Benson (2005). The data for this pilot study were collected in a series of 12 interviews that were conducted in March 2001. The study’s participants were from four different regions defined by Benson (Southern, South-Central, Central, Northwest), including two from Southern Ohio in Athens, four from Southeast-Central Ohio in Lancaster, from Central Ohio in Columbus, and two from Northwest Ohio in Findlay. The cities were chosen due to their location in the portion of Ohio in the Midlands dialect region, and Athens, Lancaster and Findlay in particular were chosen due to the similar population sizes of the cities. The specific participants were all lifelong residents of their respective areas, and additionally, they were all “upper-working/lower-middle class [and] between the ages of 30 and 70” (Benson 2005).

The participants were asked to complete two perceptual dialectology tasks over the course of their interview: a hand-drawn map and a degree of difference task. For the map task, participants were asked to note where people spoke differently on a blank map that included Ohio as well as Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New York, Kentucky and West Virginia, which differed noticeably from the national perceptual dialectology maps recommended in

Preston (2002). For the degree of difference task, participants were asked to rate several cities on a four-point scale. 1 was “exactly like you,” 2 was “a little different,” 3 was “somewhat different” and 4 was “different.” In order to help participants complete this task, they were given a map of Ohio with many Ohio cities labeled (including Cleveland, Sandusky, Toledo, Youngstown, Akron, Findlay, Mansfield, Lima, Zanesville, Columbus, Marietta, Chillicothe, Dayton, Portsmouth and Cincinnati), as well as a few cities in surrounding states (including Detroit, MI; Pittsburgh, PA; Wheeling, WV; Charleston, WV; Lexington, KY; Louisville, KY; Indianapolis, IN; and Fort Wayne, IN). Participants were also recorded as they worked on these tasks and briefly asked to expand on their responses.

The two participants from Athens differed on their hand-drawn maps, with one identifying no speech differences in Ohio and one identifying Southern Ohio as different. The degree of difference task, however, revealed that there was more agreement between the participants than the map task suggests. Both participants “indicated that the dividing line between north and south is Interstate 70” (Benson 2005, 44). Their disagreement about Southern speech was nevertheless reflected in the fact that they did not agree on whether Southern Ohio is more similar to the rest of the state or to the states south of the Ohio River. The participants from Lancaster are much like those from Athens in that they do not discuss many speech regions. Three of the four participants identified no speech differences in Ohio, and the final participant identified Northeastern Ohio (which they describe as “Amish/Mennonite”) and Southern Ohio (which is “hillbilly”). Their degree of difference tasks were similar to their hand-drawn maps.

The perceptions of the participants from Columbus are a little more complex. Two participants identified Southern Ohio speech, which they found to be similar to that of Kentucky or West Virginia, and the rest of Ohio’s speech, which they found to be similar to that of Indiana,

Michigan and Pennsylvania. Another participant also divided the state into two parts—the “upper Midwest twang”-using Northeast and the “Midwestern twang”-using remainder of the state. A final participant divided the state into three parts, which were Northern Ohio, Central Ohio, and Southern Ohio. Northern Ohio was associated with Michigan and Chicago, Central Ohio with sophistication and Southern Ohio with West Virginia. On average, the degree of difference task reflected this final participant’s tripartite division.

Finally, the two participants from Findlay both split Ohio into three parts. The first of these was Southern Ohio, which was said to sound “hillbilly” or have a “hillbilly drawl.” The second was Central Ohio. Both participants considered their native Northwestern Ohio to be a part of Central Ohio, and they both thought of Central Ohio speech as unmarked and educated. The final region, Northeastern Ohio, was where they disagreed. One participant described this region’s speech as being influenced by Dutch, whereas the other participant characterized it as “city talk.”

Unlike Benson (2005) and the current study, Campbell-Kibler (2012) focuses on the enregisterment of the “Cleveland accent” or the “northern accent” of Ohio more so than it does on comparing the perceptions of people from different subregions of Ohio. This study examines the manner in which perceptual speech regions were discussed in a variety of perceptual dialectology tasks, taking into account such factors as whether a participant merely assumed the interviewer knew about a given speech region they were discussing or the participant felt the need to corroborate their claim with personal experience. This assumption of shared cultural knowledge or lack thereof was used as the basis for determining the extent to which a variety was fully enregistered in Ohio. Despite the difference of focus of Campbell-Kibler (2012) from

the current study, it is still highly relevant due to its methodological similarity and the fact that it is the only one of two studies thus far to address evaluations of Ohio speech alone.

The data for Campbell-Kibler (2012) were collected in the Center of Science and Industry (COSI) science museum in Columbus, where patrons were approached and asked to participate in a study of Ohio dialects, then “asked for a geographic history and for a fact about themselves that they considered important to their identity” (Campbell-Kibler 2012). Although 152 patrons of COSI were interviewed, only the 89 who were lifelong residents of Ohio were considered in the final analysis.

Participants were also asked to read a series of word lists and complete one of three perceptual dialectology tasks. The first of these was a hand drawn map task of Ohio with 8 labeled cities and the edges of the surrounding states (see appendix 1). The participants were asked to mark “where they felt people in Ohio spoke similarly and differently,” as well as how similar or different neighboring states’ speech was from Ohio’s speech (Campbell-Kibler 2012). The second task was a pile-sort in which participants received several cards and were asked to group them based on the similarity of the speech of the city or region listed on the cards. These cards included Cleveland, Zanesville, Columbus, Cincinnati, Toledo, Lima, Dayton, Canton, Appalachia, Indianapolis, Louisville, Pittsburgh, Detroit and Chicago. Participants were also asked to explain their reasoning for their sortings. The final task simply consisted of the participants describing “their beliefs about how people spoke in Ohio and what differences they perceived” (Campbell-Kibler 2012).

The participants generally tended to regard Central Ohio, the region surrounding Columbus, as normal, unmarked and educated. Although they were typically unable to describe specific features of their home region, it was implicitly attributed the aforementioned qualities

because it was used as a baseline with which to compare more stigmatized speech regions.

Central Ohio as a whole was considered to be the home of Standard American English, which is telling as Standard American English is a widely recognized cultural concept in the United States.

Southern Ohio was not treated as kindly. Often considered to begin just south of Columbus and mentioned by 82% of the participants, Southern Ohio speech tended to be negatively evaluated by the participants. Southern Ohio speech was described as being slurred and full of slang, as well as associated with stigmatized stereotypes of country residents, such as hillbillies and hicks. Much like Southern and country speech, the participants also readily offered negative evaluations of urban speech, which they perceived as being “contaminated” by the speech of African Americans. These evaluations typically contained descriptions such as “ghetto” and referenced “Ebonics,” slang and the incomprehensibility of young people. Southern, country and urban speech all share a key trait as well. The participants often presupposed the existence of these varieties, making no attempt to define them or check if the interviewer recognized them. As Campbell-Kibler notes, this suggests the existence of these varieties is well established and that they are thus highly enregistered.

This stands in contrast with the speech of Northern/Northeastern Ohio. Campbell-Kibler’s participants did not discuss this region as having its own unique speech as often as other regions of Ohio or ethnic groups, and their notions of what defines Northern/Northeastern Ohio were not well developed. A handful of participants associated it with the broader north or the American northeast, but by far the most common feature identified is a raised and fronted /æ/, which is sometimes known as the “Cleveland a.” Unlike with Southern, country and urban speech, participants were not overly negative when describing the north/northeast, brushing off

its differences from Central Ohio as being insignificant or “twerks.” Additionally, participants typically bolstered their accounts of North/Northeastern speech with personal examples of encountering it. This suggests that North/Northeastern speech is not fully enregistered, as participants did not take for granted that their interlocutor would know what they were discussing.

The findings of Benson (2005) and Campbell-Kibler (2012) will be summarized again as necessary in the analysis below. In doing so, the intent is to represent the perspectives of Ohioans from multiple regions of the state, especially because no singular study represents the perspectives of people from each region. The hope is that this inclusion of multiple studies’ findings will help fill in each others’ gaps and provide a more complete picture of the role that regional origin plays in shaping Ohioans’ beliefs about linguistic variation in their own state.

## **METHODS**

In addition to the analysis of previous perceptual dialectology studies of Ohio, the current study will be relying on data that were collected for a different study (Campbell-Kibler, Bauer Forthcoming) at the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio over the course of three days. These data were notably not collected by the author herself but instead by Ohio State professor Dr. Kathryn Campbell-Kibler and two undergraduate research assistants. Patrons of the Great Lakes Science Center in Cleveland, Ohio were approached and asked to participate in a short interview for a study on Ohio dialects. The first part of this interview consisted of a portion in which the participants were asked to describe where they were from and whether they had moved, as well as their age and anything else they considered important. The interviewers also made a guess at the participant’s race at this time.

In total, 60 participants were interviewed, 37 of whom were female and 23 of whom were male. Their average age was 37.7 years with a standard deviation of 14.9 years. The interviewers judged 52 of the participants to be white and 6 to be African American. They were unable to identify the race of the remaining 2 participants with certainty. As was the case with Campbell-Kibler (2012), no socioeconomic information was obtained due to “time constraints as well as participant comfort” (8).

Despite the collection of this information, the only demographic information considered in the analysis was the participants’ regional origins. As such, any decisions to exclude participants from the analysis were based on difficulties with identifying with which region of Ohio the participant associated. This meant that 5 participants were excluded, leaving 55 for the comparative analysis.

In addition to providing their demographic information, the participants were also asked to complete three tasks. The first was a word list containing words that highlighted dialectically relevant vowels for differentiating between Inland North and Midland speakers. Data from these word lists were not considered in the current study. It is however still significant that a word list preceded the following two tasks, as it may have influenced the participants to be more focused on phonetic variation than they would have been if they had not just finished reading a word list.

The remaining two tasks were a perceptual dialectology map and a listening task. For the map task, the participants were given a map of Ohio (see appendix 1) with the cities Cleveland, Toledo, Akron, Mansfield, Lima, Columbus, Dayton and Cincinnati marked on it. They were instructed to circle any areas in Ohio where they felt people spoke differently while the interviewer took notes on their commentary. For the listening task, the participants were asked to guess where two different speakers were from. Both of the speakers in the recordings were

female Ohio State students discussing the size of their university. One of the speakers was from Columbus and one was from Cleveland. The data from these two tasks form the basis of this study.

For the purposes of clarity in the following analysis, the data collected at the Great Lakes Science Center will be referred to as “the GLSC data” and the study will be referred to as “the GLSC study.” The comparative analysis this paper is putting forward will be referred to as “the current study.”

Participants in the GLSC study were separated into groups based on their identified regional origin. 50 of the 55 participants were from Northeastern Ohio (and of those participants, 29 were from the Cleveland area), 2 were from Northwestern Ohio and 3 were from Southern Ohio. For Benson (2005), the participants from Athens and Lancaster will be considered members of the Southern Ohioan origin group, the participants from Columbus a part of the Central Ohioan group, and the participants from Findlay a part of the Northwestern Ohioan group. For Campbell-Kibler (2012), due to the lack of breakdown of participants within the study itself, nearly all the participants are considered members of the Central Ohioans group.

This means there are 50 Northeastern Ohioans, 4 Northwestern Ohioans, 7 Southern Ohioans, and approximately 90 Central Ohioans considered in the current study. The numbers for Southern and Northwestern Ohioans are significantly lower than those of the other two groups. Southern and Northwestern Ohioans also notably do not discuss as many perceptual dialects as Central or Northeastern Ohioans. Due to the scarcity of data from these two groups, the current study acknowledges that any assertions made about them must be taken with a grain of salt.



For the analysis itself, trends among participants from the origin groups were identified in the comments they made during their interviews and in the speech regions delineated on their map tasks. These trends concerned how many and which speech regions were identified (implicitly or explicitly), how the regions identified were described, and which of these regions were grouped together (if a participant mentioned Northern Ohio, did they also mention Southern Ohio?, etc). These trends were then compared with those observed by participants from other origin groups.

Finally, it is important to note that although the participants in the GLSC study occasionally identified other speech regions such as Eastern Ohio, Southeastern Ohio and Southwestern Ohio, these regions will not be discussed here. This is because this paper aims to provide a broad comparison of the perceptions of Ohioans from the north/northeastern, central and southern parts of the state, as well as the fact that discussion of Eastern, Southeastern and Southwestern Ohio were either absent from or of minimal importance in Benson (2005) and Campbell-Kibler (2012).

## **ANALYSIS**

Where speech is perceived as being different in Ohio varies a great deal depending on where the Ohioan you ask is from. Based on the three perceptual dialectology studies conducted on the state thus far (Benson 2005, Campbell-Kibler 2012 and the GLSC study), there seems to be two main perspectives on speech differences: those of Central Ohioans and Northeastern Ohioans. Southern Ohioans and Northwestern Ohioans may also represent other perceptual groups, but it is hard to make definitive claims about them due to their underrepresentation in the aforementioned studies. Interestingly, Southern Ohioans, Central Ohioans and Northeastern

Ohioans seem to correspond closely to the three main dialect regions in Ohio—the Upper South, the Lower North and the Inland North.

The treatment of specific regions by people from different regions of Ohio is best observed when each of the specific regions is examined individually. Thus, this analysis will begin by discussing perspectives on the south of the state and working its way northward.

### **Southern and Country Speak**

The speech of the American South is both very salient and highly stigmatized, and the speech of Southern Ohio is treated similarly by Ohioans from all parts of the state. Southern Ohio speech is consistently identified by people from both of the main origin groups and by Southern Ohioans. Perceptions of its size and characteristics vary based on the participants' regional origin.

The Southern Ohioans group seems to be the most reluctant to acknowledge the existence of Southern Ohio speech, and they consider its range to be very small when they actually do acknowledge it. For example, a participant in Benson (2005) restricted Southern Ohio speech to only the southeast corner of the state. Interestingly, Southern Ohioans in Benson (2005) are also quick to describe Southern Ohio speech negatively, doing things such as circling and labeling the bottom third of the state with “hillbilly slang.” The Southern Ohioans in the GLSC data, however, are not explicitly negative when describing their home region. One woman from Wilmington exemplified this trend by saying, “My parents grew up in [the Cincinnati] area and my father says his vowels a little differently, and so I think they speak differently there.”

Central Ohioans likewise take a dim view of Southern Ohio speech. They strongly associate it with rurality (which seems to be a combination of the size and remoteness of a city) and vice versa, calling reasonably far north cities such as Lima southern and saying Zanesville,

Ohio is more southern than Lexington, Kentucky, which is likely because the former is a smaller city. Central Ohioans' evaluations of Southern Ohio speech are also typically negative, attributing it to hillbillies and a "lack of education" (Cambell-Kibler 2012). Central Ohioans differ significantly from Southern Ohioans in their perceptions of the range of Southern Ohio speech, however. Unlike Southern Ohioans, who identify a small corner or strip of Ohio as Southern Ohio, Central Ohioans believe Southern Ohio speech to dominate the entire bottom third of the state, stopping just south of Columbus. As noted in Campbell-Kibler (2012), this is "surely not unrelated to the fact that the interviews were conducted in Columbus and a large number of the participants were from the city itself" (18).

Central Ohioans also frequently mentioned Southern Ohio speech; whereas Southern Ohioans did not often identify Southern Ohio speech as different, 82% of participants in Campbell-Kibler (2012) and three of the four Central Ohioans in Benson (2005) did. It is unclear if the frequency with which Central Ohioans mention Southern Ohio speech is because of their proximity and thus exposure to it or because of a desire to differentiate themselves from the stigmatized variety.

Northeastern Ohioans from the GLSC study also commonly mention Southern Ohio speech, although not quite as commonly as Central Ohioans since only 63% of the participants in the GLSC study mentioned it. This may be related to the boundaries Northeasterners draw up for Southern Ohio speech. Based on their maps and discussions, Northeasterners in the GLSC study included Columbus in Southern Ohio speech 47% of the time, and some participants even believed Southern Ohio speech to extend as far north as Mansfield (18% of participants) and, in an exceptional case, Akron (2% of participants). Northeasterners' tendency to mention Southern

Ohio speech less than Central Ohioans may be due to the south's greater geographic distance from the northeast and thus their lower degree of exposure to Southern Ohio's speech.

Another key difference between the way Southern Ohio speech is treated by Northeastern Ohioans and Central and Southern Ohioans is that while the Northeasterners usually considered it different, this difference was not considered an inherently bad thing. Descriptions of it were overall fairly value-neutral, or at least could not be assumed to be anything else without knowledge of how the participant felt about the general Southern accent Southern Ohio speech was said to resemble. Most descriptions of Southern Ohio speech by Northeasterners were similar to the following.

- (1) "Northern speaks a little differently than Southern."  
-22 year old, male, North Ridgeville
- (2) "[Cincinnatians] have a little southern drawl"  
-47 year old, female, Cleveland
- (3) "Mansfield and down you have a very distinct Southern accent, not like a true southern accent, but it's a southern accent."  
-36 year old, female, Madison

The above discussion shows that Ohioans from the south, the center and the northeast all have differing attitudes toward southern and country speech, shaping their perceptions of the size of its range and of the variety itself. The consistency of these trends within a given region points to the importance of regional origin itself. This similarity of attitudes carries over to other perceived dialects as well, as we shall see.

### **"Urban" Speech**

Just as Central Ohioans and Northeastern Ohioans have different perceptions of rural speech, so too do they perceive the speech of cities differently. As "urban" was a term provided by participants, it can be difficult to tell what precisely is meant by it. For the 19% Central

Ohioans in Campbell-Kibler (2012) who discussed urban speech, the word “urban” seemed to largely be a word used to signify the influence African American Vernacular English. Participants discussed urban speech as being different and “contaminated” by AAVE. Using charged words like “contaminated” shows that Central Ohioans do not perceive the speech of cities positively, whether they described it merely with veiled criticisms of youth speech or slang or it was outright condemned.

However, the 7 of the Northeastern Ohioans in the GLSC study who discussed urban speech took a much more positive view of it. They also did not seem to have as much racial ideology tied to their perceptions of it, as only 2 of the participants connected the speech of cities with race or ethnicity. While one gave the negative evaluation of Columbus and Cleveland speech being “ghetto thug talk,” the other was fairly neutral, commenting that the speech of residents of those cities was informed by ethnicities such as “Mexican or Italian.” The remaining participants described urban speech quite favorably. Two participants seemed to believe urban environments standardized speech, and a third referred to it as “neutral” and “newscaster English.” The final participant was overtly positive in her discussion of urban speech; she described it as “more elocuted” and “refined” than rural speech.

Why Central Ohioans are much more likely to mention race (in particular the African American race) as defining urban speech is unclear, especially since the African American population is significantly greater in Cleveland than it is in Columbus. The race of the participants themselves also does not seem to be a factor, as both Campbell-Kibler (2012) and the GLSC study consisted primarily of white participants.

It is possible that Northeastern Ohioans’ tendency to disregard race as influencing urban speech probably stems from the much larger size of the Greater Cleveland area. While Columbus

has a greater population density than Cleveland, the large size of the Greater Cleveland area may be related to Northeastern Ohioans identifying with an urban identity more so than Central Ohioans do, as it requires more time and effort to truly leave a larger metropolitan area. These differences ideas of what urbanness implies serve to illustrate the connection between regional origin and a speaker's perceptual dialectological world.

### **Central Ohio**

Central Ohio is perceived very differently by Central Ohioans and Northeastern Ohioans. Unsurprisingly for a dialect region that is generally considered by the wider public to be “general American” English (Campbell-Kibler 2012), Central Ohioans tended to think of the speech of their region as normative. Oftentimes, Central Ohioans did not even explicitly mention Central Ohio speech, instead only implying it to exist by the fact that it was used as the ruler by which other varieties were judged. When Central Ohioans did mention Central Ohio speech, they either considered it to be unmarked and not associated with any particular region of the state, U.S. or otherwise, or they attributed it with prestige by calling it educated and “a little more sophisticated than [the speech of] northerners” (Benson 2005, 48). Central Ohio speech was also said to be the speech of newsanchors.

Northeastern Ohioans in the GLSC data took a much different view of Central Ohio speech. For Northeasterners, the region of Central Ohio is neither salient nor well-defined. Unlike the Central Ohio mentioned in Campbell-Kibler (2012), this Central Ohio was never mentioned by name, only implied to exist as a sort of leftover region. This is reflected in highly variable list of cities that were included in Central Ohio. Although the region always included

<b>Table 1. Regions mentioned in relation to other regions mentioned (42 participants)</b>					
<b>One region</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Two regions</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Three regions</b>	<b>%</b>
South	34	South, North	36	South, North, Central	26
North	2	South, Central	2		
Central	0	North, Central	0		

Columbus, it could also consist of Toledo, Akron, Mansfield, Lima, and Dayton. The groupings of cities also occasionally included cities that were geographically quite far from each other, such as Mansfield and Dayton.

The status of Central Ohio as a leftover region is also reflected in the fact that it was never mentioned with fewer than two other perceptual regions (see table 1). As such, Central Ohio seems to be tied to Northern and Southern Ohio in the minds of Northeastern Ohioans since they frequently mentioned Central Ohio and one (or both) of the regions together. 8 of the 12 (67%) participants in the GLSC study who mentioned Central Ohio also mentioned Southern Ohio, and 5 (42%) also mentioned Northern Ohio. Of the remaining 4 who didn't mention Southern Ohio, 3 mentioned at least one subregion of it (Southeastern and Southwestern Ohio). This means only 1 of the 12 participants who mentioned Central Ohio didn't discuss the south in some way. Of the remaining 7 participants who mentioned Central Ohio but didn't mention Northern Ohio, 6 mentioned at least one of its subregions (Northeastern and Northwestern). Again, this means only one of the participants mentioned Central Ohio without mentioning the north in some way. The constant association of this unnamed middle area with surrounding regions suggests that Central Ohio serves as some sort of buffer between Northern Ohio and Southern Ohio.

This is further supported by the ways in which it is described. Three participants seemed to think of it as a convergence zone of speech, calling it a “mix” and a “melting pot.” Another called it a mix specifically between Northeastern and Southern speech, and a final participant described Columbus as “kind of a little bit like Cincinnati but not as strong.” While Central Ohio

was occasionally described as distinct, the recurrence of the idea that it is a sort of convergence or transition zone suggests the region has a place in the north-south gradation in the perceptual words of these participants, even if it is not as salient as its counterparts.

Interestingly, the Northwestern Ohioans from Findlay, in Benson (2005), despite being geographically north like their eastern counterparts, seemed to identify more with Central Ohio speech than with that of Northeastern Ohio. One participant identified all speech in Ohio other than that of the Northeast and the South as “good plain English,” and the other participant grouped Northwestern Ohio with Columbus, identifying the city’s speech as being educated and unaccented. This trend is not reflected by the views of the two Northwestern Ohioans in the GLSC study, however, as they both identified an undifferentiated north and no Central Ohio. It is hard to say why this is the case, although it is perhaps related to the fact that the two participants in the current study were from Marblehead and Norwalk, both of which are farther north than Findlay and thus harder to justify being included in Central Ohio.

The importance of regional origin in shaping perceptions of regional speech can again be seen in the views described above. Since the Central Ohioans are from the region they are describing, they are quick to attribute it with normalcy. The Northeastern Ohioans in the GLSC study did not do the same, instead orienting their perceptual worlds elsewhere and seeing Central Ohio as similar but still somewhat different. The importance of regional origin will again be demonstrated in the following section, where Central Ohioans see the north as a region of otherness and the Northeasterners see it as a region of normalcy.

### **Northern Ohio**

In general, the Central Ohioans in Benson (2005) and Campbell-Kibler (2012) thought of Northern Ohioans as speaking differently from themselves, although this tendency to



acknowledge differences is not nearly as common as it is for Southern Ohio speech. This acknowledgement of differences seems to be especially true of Northeastern Ohio, as Central Ohioans' discussion of Northern Ohio speech frequently focused on Cleveland, as well as less frequently focusing on Akron and Youngstown. However, despite perceiving Northern or Northeastern Ohio speech as unlike their own, Central Ohioans did not usually discuss it negatively. Even when they did, their evaluations were only mildly negative, such as describing its features as "silly" (Campbell-Kibler 2012, 29). Central Ohioans tended to think of Northeastern speech as just being another dialect, that, while not standard, was still acceptable. Another trend was for participants to associate Northeastern Ohio speech with nearby locations such as Michigan, or with "canonically accented areas" such as New York and Boston (Campbell-Kibler 2012, 29).

The two Northwesterners in Benson (2005) seemed to follow the same general trend as Central Ohioans. They both aligned their own speech with that of Columbus, to which, as mentioned in the previous section, they attributed prestige. For their map task, both participants marked off Northeastern Ohio as having different speech, although they did not agree as to how it was different. One participant described Northeastern Ohio speech with the phrase "city talk," presumably because of its association with Cleveland, and the other used the phrase "slight Dutch," presumably because of the large Amish population in parts of the northeastern corner of Ohio. Interestingly, the two Northwestern Ohioans in the GLSC study did not replicate this pattern, instead identifying one undifferentiated region of Northern speech. Again, this is possibly because both of the participants in the current study were from further north than those in Benson (2005) and thus were less likely to consider their speech similar to that of Central Ohio.

Unlike the Central Ohioans and the Northwesterners in Benson (2005) and the Central Ohioans in Campbell-Kibler (2012), the Northeastern Ohioans in the GLSC study oriented their perceptual worlds around Northeastern speech. Based on the data collected for the GLSC study, they typically described themselves as normal or unmarked. This assumption of normalcy is reflected in the fact that while Northern Ohio was a commonly identified speech region, it was primarily mentioned in interviews where Southern Ohio speech was also mentioned; 89% of participants who mentioned Northern Ohio speech also mentioned Southern Ohio speech, whereas only 42% of participants who mentioned Southern Ohio speech also mentioned Northern Ohio speech. This suggests that the participants consider the speech of their home region something of a default, only thinking to comment on it when contrasting it with a more salient region.

However, just as Central Ohioans did not seem to be uniformly aware of differences found in Northern Ohio speech, so too were the Northeasterners in the GLSC study in disagreement about the normalcy of their own speech region. A small portion of the participants described Northern Ohio speech as nasal, and one participant called it “north coast” and “Canadianish.” Participants who focused on the Northeast in particular also frequently mentioned a Cleveland accent, and similar to the views the participants in Campbell-Kibler (2012), this Cleveland accent’s most salient feature is its “nasal” or “flat” A’s. The Cleveland accent was also variously described as “more east coast,” over enunciated and just over exerted,” and “speak[ing] through the nose and smil[ing] through a lot of their vowels.” Despite these similarities to the views of Central Ohioans, these participants did not represent the majority of the participants from their region, meaning Northeastern Ohioans are significantly different from Ohioans from other regions of the state. It is also worth noting that the participants in the GLSC

study who discussed the Cleveland accent were from the Northeast at large as opposed to the Cleveland area. This points to the importance of regional origin on an even smaller scale, as it suggests the Clevelanders see their speech differently than the other neighboring Northeasterners do, as the term “Cleveland accent” does not seem to be something Clevelanders themselves are using as much as their neighbors.

A final way in which the Northeasterners conceptualized Northern Ohio speech differently is that the participants in the Cleveland study have a strong idea of Northeastern and Northwestern Ohio speech as being separate speech regions. Northeastern Ohio was not only identified more frequently than Northwestern Ohio, but the two subregions also had a relationship similar to the one between Southern and Northern Ohio described earlier. 72% of the participants who mentioned Northwestern Ohio speech also mentioned Northeastern Ohio speech, whereas 50% of the participants who mentioned Northeastern Ohio also mentioned Northwestern Ohio. This emphasis on the difference between Northeastern and Northwestern speech is also reflected in the fact that although participants were unable to describe features of Northwestern speech, they still made sure to differentiate between the two northern subregions; they did not know how the Northwest was different, they just knew that it was not a part of the Northeast and thus the people who lived there could not possibly talk like people from the Northeast. The fact that Central Ohioans were not particularly concerned with this differentiation while Northeastern Ohioans were also highlights the importance of regional origin in shaping the perceptions of speech differences and in dividing up a large region into smaller categories.

## **CONCLUSION**

As shown above, Ohio is home to at least two main perceptual groups that roughly correspond to some of the traditional dialect regions of the state, a significant finding as it adds

weight to the production boundaries by establishing their cultural significance in the lives of their residents. The first of these groups, which aligns with the Lower North, consists of Central Ohioans. They discuss Southern Ohio speech a great deal, perhaps to make a point of not allowing themselves from being mistaken as Southern. As for the speech of the north and the northeast in particular, Central Ohioans generally perceive it to be different from their own self-described normal speech but not necessarily as bad; it is more of a curiosity to them than something to be looked down upon. The other main group aligns with the Inland North and its members are from Northeastern Ohio. Much like Central Ohioans, Northeastern Ohioans typically tend to think of their own speech as normal, although they will sometimes describe themselves as different in fairly neutral ways. Northeastern Ohioans do not seem to have a concept of a Central Ohio other than as a nameless transition zone between their own speech region and the stigmatized south.

The reason for this detailed discussion of speech differences may be due in part to the unique dialectological position of Ohio, as three major dialect boundaries cross through the state. Based on previous studies, however, it seems unlikely that participants will perceive their state as entirely devoid of linguistic variation even if there aren't major dialect boundaries based on production present within the state. Evans (2011) is an example of this; this study examines the perceptual dialectology of Washington state, which is typically considered by dialectologists to be homogenous. It finds that residents do still perceive differences in speech within their state, even if these differences are only between the speech of rural or urban speakers.

For future work, it would be of great value to conduct a similar study in regions of Ohio that are underrepresented in the samples of the current study as well as in Benson (2005) and Campbell-Kibler (2012), such as Northwestern Ohio, Southwestern Ohio and Southeastern Ohio.

This may reveal that there are even more perceptual groups in Ohio than the current study is able to reasonably propose and shed further light on what social, geographic or linguistic distinctions are important in the linguistic worlds of Ohioans. Similar studies could also be conducted within subregions of other states to examine what origin-based perceptual groups might exist and to see to what extent all states exhibit perceptual variation by origin such as this. Both types of study would help further refute Preston's (2002) claim that US speakers do not perceive finely tuned linguistic variation in individual states, as this study has done.

In addition to demonstrating the existence of two perceptual groups, the current study also suggests that perceptual variation can take place on an even smaller scale than has been previously shown to exist. While both people from the Cleveland area and people from the northeastern areas outside it are both from Northeastern Ohio, they do not seem to place the same degree of importance on subregions of the northern and southern parts of Ohio. The Northeastern Ohioans from outside the Cleveland area are considerably more likely to mention Northwestern speech and Southeastern speech. This trend is not as strong as others observed over the course of this study, but it does open up the possibility to push the limits of perceptual dialectology. Future studies could examine the extent to which participants could explain speech differences within a given subregion of Ohio or any other state, and a map task could be applied to even smaller areas than subregions, such as individual cities. In doing so, researchers would be able to benefit from the ethnographic power of perceptual dialectology and get an even richer picture of perceptual factors that shape people's linguistic lives.

**Appendix 1.**



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